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## Advisory

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Defense Department Briefing on Ongoing DoD Response to Hurricane Katrina

MR. WHITMAN: Admiral Keating, this is Bryan Whitman. Can you hear me?

ADM. KEATING: Loud and clear, Bryan. How are you this morning?

MR. WHITMAN: We can hear you fine, thank you. And thank you for joining us today. We had anticipated doing this via video today, but we've had some technical difficulties and so we didn't want to miss this opportunity with Admiral Keating so we're going to do this via telephone and audio only.

Admiral Tim Keating is of course the NORTHCOM Commander and he's joining us today from Colorado Springs. He was just down in Louisiana and Mississippi and got a first-hand view of what the military forces there are doing in aiding in the relief effort. He's going to give you a brief overview and then take some of your questions and I promised to get him back to work fairly quickly.

So Admiral, with that, let me just turn it over to you.

ADM. KEATING: Thank you, Bryan, and good morning, everybody. Thanks for the opportunity to share some perspective with you and answer your questions and I'll do my best here in just a minute to give you the answers that you're looking for.

I was down there, as Bryan mentioned, with the secretary of defense and the chairman, General Myers, and saw firsthand the damage done by Katrina. Pretty significant. The numbers that you all have heard has devastated an area about 90,000 square miles, larger than Great Britain. But a point that I want to make to you, that in spite of the widespread devastation a very clear sense I got in talking to active duty, Guard military personnel and civilians. I talked to a doctor who drove down from Massachusetts; a young lady -- an Arkansas nurse -- who were in the airport concourse there where the Guard had set up a medical triage facility in the Louis Armstrong Airport. They drove down by themselves along with hundreds of National Guardsmen and active duty medical personnel to take care of the folks who needed help.

We went over to Keesler Air Force Base and got to talk to some of the families who were stationed there at Keesler, close to Biloxi. I talked to one young lady who had her baby in her arms with tears coming down her face. She had just gotten back and seen her home, or at least the concrete pad that was her home. They got in their car and drove north as fast as they could ahead of Katrina, came back, and there was nothing there.

Let me tell you, the spirit of these folks -- the Massachusetts doctor, the Arkansas nurse, the young lady from Keesler Air Force Base and everybody I saw -- it's an unmistakable spirit. They're wearing T-shirts over there in Keesler -- "We're going to kick Katrina's ass". So they've got a pretty good attitude.



There are chaplains in and amongst all of these folks from the Guard, from the active duty, and from the private world, if you will, the civilians, who are helping out immensely.

We've got almost 13,000 active duty forces in theater right now --- that's the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi area, our joint operations area. Thirteen thousand active duty, another couple of thousand coming; 38,000 National Guardsmen and women and Air National Guardsmen and women. We have over 300 DoD helicopters performing search and rescue missions, providing humanitarian assistance.

From a land forces perspective, as you all know the president ordered that the 82nd Airborne move out from Fort Bragg. The 1st Cavalry coming from the west, from Fort Hood, Texas. And Marine Corps expeditionary units from both Camp LeJeune, East, and Pendleton, West. Coming about this time tomorrow, a little bit tomorrow afternoon, that force will number between 7,200 and 7,500 Soldiers and Marines who will be on the ground assisting the National Guard with search and rescue and humanitarian assistance.

Naval forces, we have 21 ships in the area. The United States ship Harry S. Truman, an aircraft carrier, is in the waters just south of Mississippi. We've got an amphibious ship pier side in New Orleans. Another one, a big deck amphib, the USS Iwo Jima, should be pier side downtown New Orleans by about noon today.

The United States Air Force, through the Transportation Command is flowing all of the equipment and humanitarian assistance. We have delivered by air and land 6.5 million meals to Louisiana so far; over two million so Mississippi. There are another 3.5 million meals in the pipeline flowing forward. Fifteen million gallons of water are coming. We've got 116 million pounds of ice. So those are big numbers. I don't give them to you necessarily to impress you how much we can move stuff, I want you to understand how hard the Department of Defense is working to assist the National Guard, FEMA, and Department of Homeland Security, Secretary Chertoff, in providing the assistance to those folks who have been hit so hard in Louisiana and in Mississippi.

So I come back from our visit yesterday very much encouraged by the spirit of the folks who are still there, but of course our sympathy to those families who have lost loved ones or don't know where their loved ones are yet. There's still a significant number of people missing and we'll keep all of those families in our hearts and our prayers.

I'll be happy to take any questions, Bryan.

MR. WHITMAN: All right. Thank you for that overview, admiral. We'll get started right here.

If you'd identify yourselves since the Admiral can't see, and I think he knows some of you. Let's start with Bob.

Q: Admiral, this is Bob Burns from AP.

ADM. KEATING: Good morning, Bob.

Q: Good morning. I wanted to ask you to go back a little bit on the ground forces. The 82nd Airborne and the 1st Cavalry. Have those numbers

changed in terms of for example the 82nd Airborne, the folks from the 82nd who are already in New Orleans have said today that they're going to have 4,700 from Fort Bragg by the end of tomorrow. I'm wondering -- and they'd said there'd be 1,700 from the 1st Cavalry in the New Orleans area, too. Are all of them going to New Orleans, Louisiana, actually? And what are the numbers by division there?

ADM. KEATING: I'll get you the numbers by division, Bob. I'm going on the information I have here, that most of those, writ large, the Army's going to Louisiana and the Marine Corps is going to Mississippi. We have a Marine Corps Special MAGTAF Command and Control element that is already in place with a two star, Major General O Dell, there for the Marines. And the president, when we initially reported to him that we'd be able to get about 7,200 to 7,500, as the troops have arrived and the command leaders are in place, they are going back to their home guard units and if they need certain additional support -- logistics, communications -- those forces are flowing as well. So I'm not surprised that the numbers are swelling just a little bit.

Q: Admiral, Jamie McIntyre from CNN.

ADM. KEATING: Good morning, Jamie.

Q: Good morning. No doubt you're well aware of the criticism -- the debate about the speed and the scale of the initial deployment of relief. I'm just curious from your perspective, where you sit, and I know everyone's working very hard. But I'm wondering if you believe that this was the best response that could be mounted considering the magnitude of what you were up against, or do you believe that a better job could or should have been done?

ADM. KEATING: It's a good question, Jamie. From where I sit, of course we can do better. There will be lessons learned. We have teams in place both in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi to record those lessons so that it's not just lessons observed, but we convert them into lessons learned.

On the other hand, the notion that we were a little late to need, I'll offer you the following observations.

As Katrina was coming northwest out of the Caribbean, we started to make plans here in this headquarters in conjunction with FEMA to support Department of Homeland Security, about five days before Katrina made landfall. Once she eventually did, she came across, as you'll recall, the southern tip of Florida on I think it was Thursday, the 25th of August and Friday the 26th. It got back into the Gulf, and then we learned that she was going to strengthen.

At that time on the Saturday/Sunday timeframe when we learned, the 27th/28th of August, that Katrina was building and was going to go through a Category 2 to a 3, we had disaster control officers, DCOs, who are active duty Army colonels, we moved them forward to Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Now you will of course appreciate, we don't want to put troops in front of a massive storm like this. When I was dropping bombs in Desert Storm, that was not an issue with which we were worried. We weren't going to be dropping bombs on our own forces so we did not want to put our forces in front of this massive hurricane.

As soon as the hurricane cleared, and by the way, we were preparing deployment orders as we saw Katrina strengthen on the late Saturday/Sunday 28

August timeframe as she began to approach Louisiana and Mississippi, we alerted various forces to be prepared to move as soon as the situation on the ground stabilized and as soon as Department of Homeland Security, through FEMA, determined what particular assets we would need.

For example, we began putting Transportation Command assets aside, heavy lift airplanes, because we knew we would need food and water and ice as quickly as we could. We also used ground transportation capabilities that we have. We brought the USS Baton, a large amphibious ship which was in the Gulf of Mexico anyway, she went well south to avoid the hurricane. As soon as we knew that the hurricane was moving north and hit landfall we brought Baton up behind her so she was providing helicopter search and rescue capability on Tuesday, just as the hurricane was moving up through northern Mississippi and on into Tennessee and Kentucky.

So that's kind of a long answer to a short question, Jamie. We will of course work very carefully with the Department of Homeland Security to analyze the reaction to this particular disaster, but the fact that the Department of Defense wasn't ready or wasn't well prepared, I think is not correct.

Q: One quick follow-up. Among the debate this week was whether or not the response should have been federalized, I understand is the term of art. Can you just tell us about what advantage or disadvantage federalizing the operation would have meant?

ADM. KEATING: From our perspective it would not have provided an advantage over our current situation. I think this is a topic of, I know it's a topic of discussion between the president, the attorney general, the secretary of defense, and Secretary Chertoff, but from this headquarters through General Honore, Jamie, we're satisfied with the current command and control arrangement where the governors of Mississippi and Louisiana exercised their constitutional prerogative of control of the National Guard, and Russ Honore as Joint Task Force Katrina's commander has command of the active duty forces.

Q: Admiral, Nick Simian, Fox News.

If there wasn't a problem in getting assets and stuff into the region, how do you explain the fact that it took a long time to get aid initially to the people in need? What accounts for that?

ADM. KEATING: It's an interesting question, Dick. From our perspective, aid was moving before the storm hit. From the perspective of those folks who were without food and water for a couple of hours, maybe overnight into the next day, in Louisiana and Mississippi, that's a long time.

So this is one of those lessons learned that we will work very carefully with Secretary Chertoff and his folks as the lead federal agency to ensure that we shrink those timelines if another disaster of this magnitude occurs. We will work closely with FEMA and DHS to minimize the timelines.

Q: At this point can you point to anything in the process that accounts for that delay?

ADM. KEATING: Well, again, that's assuming — delay is a relative term, and I sure don't mean to be confrontational about it, Dick, but we had stuff moving before the storm hit. So there is a time/distance/heading challenge. There

is also the fact that most of the roads that I saw yesterday still have trees covering them. Interstate 10 is open north of the worst hard hit area. So we had helicopters moving stuff. The volume they can carry is of course less than you can put in the back of a big old flatbed truck. So moving around the area in and of itself is a challenge. That is one of, again, those lessons learned. If there are better ways of getting through hurricane damaged areas, we will of course explore those.

Q: Admiral, this is Scott Foster, with NBC News.

ADM. KEATING: Hi Scott.

Q: How are you?

ADM. KEATING: Fine, thanks.

Q: At this point, do you expect any more troops to go? From where you sit, how would you rate where we are in terms of the recovery?

ADM. KEATING: I think we're about, for troops on the ground absent some other natural disaster, and we were watching very carefully weather patterns. And again, one of our jobs in Northern Command is to defeat any and all attacks on the United States and support federal agencies that the secretary and the president tell us to, which we're doing in this case for Department of Homeland Security. We're watching the terrorist situation here in our headquarters very, very carefully. But I think the number of troops on the ground is probably about right from the active duty side. We're continuing to flow some TRANSCOM Air Force assets in and out, so that number varies a little bit. I think the Marines are at about the right number. There are some more Navy ships coming, as you probably know. The Comfort, the hospital ship, is in Mayport, Florida, today putting some more medical supplies on. She'll come around and be in place I think Thursday. So the numbers will rise a little bit, but I believe we're at about, the status quo today is about where we'll be.

Q: One quick follow-up on the Comfort.

ADM. KEATING: Sure.

Q: Some politicians have criticized the deployment of the Comfort, saying that by the time it gets there, most everyone will be gone from New Orleans. But can you tell us what role it will be able to serve and how it will be able to provide humanitarian relief and medical support?

ADM. KEATING: It will have, I don't know how many of you have been on it, but it is a floating hospital, as you know, with hundreds of beds for patients and 10 or 12 major operating rooms. However, we may not need so much medical support at that time, but Comfort also provides comfort for workers or troops or sailors who, anybody, civilians, residents, who might need a place to live or rest or recuperate. Some of these folks that I was talking to yesterday, active duty and Guard, have been hard at it for four or five days. They're tired. There are not a whole lot of Ramadas still down there where they can go take a two- or three-day vacation, so we might be able to provide some comfort for them on board the Comfort.

MR. WHITMAN: I think, Admiral, later in the week here we'll actually get some experts to kind of talk about the role of the Comfort back here, too.

Times New Service?

Q: Admiral, this is Vince Crawley with the Army Times papers.

You've done, military officials have really gone to great pains to say that they're supporting federal officials, federal civilian leadership which is part of the posse comitatus laws from the 1870s. Would the response have been any different if the military could have been in charge from the very beginning of the disaster?

ADM. KEATING: I don't think so, Vince. That's a good question. I keep going back to these lessons learned. We will get to that once we have the situation on the ground as stable as it can be in the eyes of Department of Homeland Security. We'll look at pros and cons of shifting control of National Guard forces to the secretary of defense and the president should they need them. But the Department of Homeland Security did not ask for that, nor did the president give it to us in the early days of the disaster, as you know.

Q: General, this is Jim Manion from Agence France Press.

ADM. KEATING: Hi, Jim.

Q: Can you give us a sense of how long this force is likely to be in that area? By my count it would be over, including National Guard, it would be over 50,000 troops. So how long can they be realistically sustained there doing this kind of work? And do you already project some sort of scaling down at some point, or is it too early to tell?

ADM. KEATING: Good question, Jim. It's too early to tell. We will remain there as long as Secretary Chertoff and Secretary Rumsfeld tell the president they need to be there.

It's important to emphasize, as you just said, that we're in support of the Department of Homeland Security, so it's Secretary Chertoff's recommendation to the president.

We are already working very hard on, quote, what will be the end state. The damage that I saw first-hand yesterday recommends to me that we will be there for a while. The flooding, the floodwaters are receding I believe ever so slowly in New Orleans, so that problem -- the challenges will shift a little bit. As the waters go down folks are going to want to get back in their homes to get power restored. A lot of the homes in Louisiana are made of wood, so as the wood dries we have another challenge, all of us in disaster response, for ensuring that we don't have fires of any magnitude and we're working on that.

In Mississippi, just restoring infrastructure. We're providing some military satellite bandwidth to cell phone companies so that they can get back to their servers and enable cell phone transmission amongst the civilian population in Mississippi.

So we're going to be there a while. I think we'll be there a relatively long time. I would see it in months and not weeks.

By the way, just one more word. You raised a great point. Here we're bringing 7500 soldiers and Marines in. There's a significant logistics tail there too. That would lead to the increase, I forget who it was, Bob or Jamie or Dick, one of the earlier questions, how come the numbers are changing. As we get

boots on the ground and the commanders assess the situation they will have to provide for their own logistics and their own berthing and bedding and food and supplies for the machines -- the tanks and helos -- not tanks. We're not moving tanks. I'm sorry. No tanks. But wheeled vehicles and helicopters. So providing our own logistics will cause for some increase, fluctuation in the numbers of troops.

MR. WHITMAN: A couple more, then let the Admiral get back to work.

Mike?

Q: Admiral, it's Mike Mount with CNN.

ADM. KEATING: Hi, Mike.

Q: I don't know if it's too early, but do you have an estimated price tag yet for Northern Command for your role in the recovery efforts?

ADM. KEATING: It's too early, Mike. As you know, Congress has given the President I think it's a \$10 billion supplemental. We're not counting it up yet. We will, but it's too early to tell. I've been told whatever it takes. So we're not going wild-eyed, but we're sending forces and supplies as they're needed.

MR. WHITMAN: Bob, let's finish up with you then.

Q: Admiral, Bob Burns again.

I wanted to ask you about the temporary housing question. Where are you on establishing tent cities or using military bases in the region to house people?

ADM. KEATING: Health and Human Services has asked the Department of Defense to provide space, if you will, ground, and the number is changing -- the last I heard it was four, and that may go up. Four of these temporary medical facilities where anybody in need of care can go. Several in Louisiana, several in Mississippi. We have about ten different locations where Health and Human Services if they need it could put down these sort of medical facilities to ease the strain on the hospitals. I know the Department of Defense is working closely with DHS for houses that may be on military bases outside of the affected area in case folks will need that. I don't know the status of those discussions, but I know it's something we're considering carefully.

MR. WHITMAN: Admiral, thank you. We've gone a little bit past our time, but we appreciate you hanging with us while we had some technical difficulties. And more importantly, we appreciate the fact that you're providing us with somebody from your command or yourself on a very regular basis to give us these periodic updates back here at the Pentagon.

ADM. KEATING: Bryan, thanks. It's a remarkable effort. I was privileged to see it first-hand yesterday, this total Department of Defense, National Guard, civilian and contractor effort to relieve the pain and suffering of our fellow citizens down there. They need our help, and we're dedicated to providing it as quickly as we can.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, sir.

ADM. KEATING: Thanks, Bryan.